

Education for Environmental Sustainability (EES) is fundamental to implement transformative education at national and European level and facilitate the transition to a just and green society. The power of such education equips learners with the tools to understand the interconnections among natural systems, human actions, and the need for individuals and groups to analyse issues, make decisions, and take actions that support sustainable ecosystems. The Council Recommendation should ensure that Education for Environmental Sustainability encompasses a lifelong and life-wide learning approach and contributes to the progress towards the Sustainable Development target 4.7. Education for Environmental Sustainability should be aligned with existing international frameworks on education, such as the UNESCO Framework for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD for 2030). The proposal should also be consistent with the policy commitments of the EU on the topic of climate change and sustainability such as the European Green Deal as to promote policy coherence and avoid the dangers of siloisation of EU policy.

Non-formal and informal learning

The role of informal and non-formal education is pivotal to the provision of Education for Environmental Sustainability. We encourage the European Commission to provide avenues for learners of different ages and generations to support and learn from each other, sharing their knowledge, skills and experiences. The initiatives developed from the Recommendation should ensure that learners have the opportunity to develop transversal competences that can prepare them adequately for the green and digital transitions, such as key sustainability competences that can be understood as transversal, multifunctional and context-independent. Further, we call on the Commission to ensure that the provision of Education for Environmental Sustainability is accessible and inclusive, with opportunities for continuous professional development, reaching those who are not normally reached by formal education such as disadvantaged groups. Such process should be continuously updated and rooted in lifelong learning. In this framework, EES should acknowledge and address the unequal impact of climate disruption and environmental decline on such groups and therefore include them in the development of skills to address these environmental challenges. The Commission proposal should encompass the support to all education and training systems and should strengthen collaboration between different parts of the system (for example between formal and non-formal education, or between schools, vocational education and training and higher education, and between different generations of learners). To this end, it is pivotal to establish mechanisms to recognise and validate sustainability-related skills and competences and provide adequate funding to validation processes, adult learning initiatives and continuous professional development opportunities for teachers that fit their needs and do not overburden them.

Civil society involvement

In order to mainstream Education for Environmental Sustainability, collaboration across different learning sectors and formal, informal and non-formal education providers must be fostered, through the application of a whole-institution approach. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) need to be empowered to mainstream EES and support the capacity-building of teachers through the provision of comprehensive training and awareness raising workshops. Furthermore, the expertise of Civil Society Organisations should be leveraged to support the reformation of formal education towards the adoption of Education for Environmental Sustainability. CSOs have acquired key experience on the ground in the provision of EES,

employing innovative pedagogical practices such as experiential learning and projects that create linkages between personal, local consumption and the global impact, often through the establishment of alliances with sustainability practitioners. We hope to see a proposal that encompasses the provision of support to scale-up best practices. With such expertise, CSOs could provide tools to teachers and educators to help them integrate EES in formal education. Therefore the exchange of knowledge and practices between curriculum based learning and non-formal and informal learning should be promoted. The proposal should also envisage the provision of avenues for civil society to contribute to policy-making, committing to the meaningful inclusion of in the design and implementation of EES curricula.

Further, we call on the European Commission to ensure the support of learners at community level, strengthening the lifelong and life-wide learning aspect of volunteering and community projects. Further, we hope to see a democratic and engaging approach to EES, which aims to foster the active participation of all actors in society, developing competences for taking collective action to embed sustainability at all levels. Collective responses to the climate crisis are the only ones that can ensure the wellbeing of all learners.

Funding

The spending on education as a percentage of the GDP has decreased across Europe, as the EU average in 2018 was slightly below the 2015 level, at 4.6%. The COVID-19 pandemic and its related economic crisis further reduced such funding. As a result, education providers do not have the tools to revolutionise the entire educational process to include EES. Investment in education cannot be decreased further and has to be significantly increased if there is any chance of developing the skills needed for learners to adapt to the twin transitions of the 21st century and to a globalised society. It is therefore pivotal to dedicate higher percentages of total government spending on education and increase the allocation for EES in existing EU funding programmes such as the Erasmus+ and ESF+ programmes. Furthermore, the proposal should encompass earmarking for funding that is allocated to organisations that complement formal education on EES. We call on the EU to guarantee adequate, long-term funding at European, national, regional and local level for environmental sustainability education, using different funding programmes in ways that create synergies and complementarity, especially investing in teacher training.

See more here:

[SOLIDAR Foundation Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020](#)

[SOLIDAR Foundation Policy Paper on Global Citizenship Education](#)